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Operations in Somalia:

Examples of the Need for Greater Flexibility and Lateral Outreach

in Conducting Military/Civilian/Humanitarian Operations

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Abstract of

OPERATIONS IN SOMALIA: EXAMPLES OF THE NEED FOR GREATER FLEXIBILITY AND LATERAL OUTREACH IN CONDUCTING MILITARY/CIVILIAN/HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS

The U. S. military effort in Somalia from 1992 to 1994 provides a number of examples for study. These are drawn from US civil/military coordination efforts, from the relations of US forces with foreign forces, and from US military relations with humanitarian relief organizations. Analysis of these examples provides arguments for greater emphasis on cooperation, lateral outreach and flexibility in achieving unity of effort and methods of command and control appropriate to the circumstances. Such emphasis will enable commanders to lead more effectively and, where the military are not the principle element, to participate in ways that better guarantee fulfillment of the mission.

Introduction

It is the purpose of this paper to use our various efforts in Somalia between January 1992 and March 1994 to examine some of the difficulties of conducting combined peace operations or military operations other than war (MOOTW). The Joint Military Doctrine for MOOTW emphasizes the need for flexibility in Command and Control arrangements: "JCFs and their subordinates should be flexible in modifying standard arrangements to meet specific requirements of each situation and promote unity of effort."[i] I will argue that such flexibility was not sufficiently underscored in the Somali Operations and I will particularly focus on the need for greater understanding of the importance of cooperation in those areas where strict military Command and Control are not appropriate. Finally, I will note the requirement for greater attention to the reality on the ground. Many of the errors that occurred could have been prevented if the views of the people most knowledgeable of Somali situations had been brought into the decision-making process earlier. All of these considerations flow from the innate foreignness of such operations: as is understood, but insufficiently, standard military operating procedures require sensitive modification in these situations. Lateral reaching out needs to be emphasized as much as vertical communications along the chain of command.

Somalia presents a particularly rich environment to examine such issues because of the complexity both of the background realities with which officials were forced to deal, and because of the number and variety of participants. These included the US civilian and military participants, other states and their civilian and military officials, the UN and its subsidiary organizations, Humanitarian Relief Organizations (HROs, a subset of Non-Governmental Organizations or NGOs), the media, businesses, and, not least, the Somalis themselves and their various leaders -- pretended and otherwise. "The staggering scope and complexity of the tasks involved in responding to complex emergencies demand the coordinated action of a wide array of contributors... By any measure, the potential contributors -- both in the international arena and within the USG -- remain a loose, unintegrated set of actors, who, not surprisingly, hold fast to different perspectives, goals, capabilities, structures and cultures."[ii]

Questions of command and control are innate in any organized effort, and central to any military operation. However, the Somalia examples illustrate the difficulty of applying such concepts in the context of international military-civilian humanitarian relief efforts. Here C2 needs to take into consideration the fuzzier relationships that inevitably exist in such an environment, accommodating, where necessary, the need for a greater degree of coordination among organizations and elements which are, after all, generally attempting to work towards the same end. Useful examples for study can be found at all levels, but we shall look at problems arising

- between US civilian and military elements;

- between US forces and foreign forces;
- among US elements (State, DOD, NSC); and
- between DOD & State on one side and HROs on the other.

Background

Somalia was one of a handful of African states spared the tribal divisions, which drive the destructive politics of most of the Continent. Being all of one ethnic group, the Somalis would seem, at first glance, to offer a greater ease of government and harmony than is found among her neighbors. This is, alas, not so.[1] The Somalis are riven by clan and sub-clan divisions "almost impossible for a foreigner to understand."[iii] Often divided in bitter personal and family feuds which erupt from their nomadic lives and codes of personal honor, they unite generally only against a foreign threat.

The Somali Republic, a merger of British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland became independent in 1960. The rough approximation of a democratic system, that was put in place at independence, was overthrown in 1969 by Siad Barre. Siad came to power intent on incorporating the Somalis who live beyond the border of the Republic. While there are large numbers of Somalis in Kenya and Djibouti (the then French Territory of the Afars and Issas), it was the Somalis of the Ethiopian Ogaden who were his immediate object. Seeking greater international support, he signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the USSR in 1974, received vast quantities of arms, and sponsored

[1] The author was desk officer for Somali Affairs at the Department of State from 1975 to 1978. In 1992 and 1993 he was Political Counselor in Nairobi with State Somali reporting officers working in his section. Some of the comments in this paper are based on his particular background knowledge of Somali society and events.

revolt and eventual invasion of Ethiopia. Unfortunately, after the Emperor was dethroned by coup in 1974, the Soviets saw an opening in Addis Ababa. As had the US, the Soviets valued the Ethiopian prize more than the Somali, and established a close relationship with the bloody revolutionary, Mengistu. This provoked Siad to seek military ties with the West, which he fostered by repudiating the Friendship Treaty in November, 1997 and expelling the Soviet military advisors. From his perspective (and that of many Somalis), he had chosen ill, because the carefully circumscribed US military assistance did not allow him to win his war in the Ogaden. Though defeated, he did not fall, and he maintained himself through increasing repression of enemy clans. His harsh measures (including the bombing of a Somali city) provoked a successful revolt led by Mohamed Farah Aideed.

Siad fled Mogadishu in January 1991 shortly after Amb. Bishop closed our Embassy. The Somalis in the north (in the former British colony) declared their independence, and the south (the former Italian colony) descended into factional strife and famine. In March 1991, the State Department declared a disaster to exist in Somalia, thus activating an effort by the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance. (The problem at that stage was not mass starvation, but civilian casualties and refugees.) By the fall of that year, however, a severe drought had struck southern Somalia and in November Aideed's sub-clan and that of his chief Mogadishu rival (Ali Mahdi, interim president) began fighting in the capital city. In January 1992 the Secretary-General named a special envoy and on Jan. 23rd the UNSC placed an arms embargo on Somalia, called for humanitarian aid, and urged a

cease-fire. (The USG had opposed a Cape Verdean proposal that peace-keeping troops be sent.)[iv]

An experienced Algerian diplomat, Mohamed Sahnoun, was named the Secretary-General's special envoy in April 1992. The Somalis were distrustful of the UN which had seemed to do little in the face of the collapse of the Somali state (in contrast to the efforts of some HROs (especially ICRC, SOS, Medicins sans Frontieres, International Medical Corps, Save the Children, Irish Concern and CARE who had stayed the course and were constantly in a number of places in Somalia).[v] They were also inclined (some, like Aideed, greatly so) to distrust the representative of Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali who as Egyptian Deputy Foreign Minister had been identified with a pro-Siad policy. But Sahnoun adopted a policy of careful consultation with the Somali faction leaders, Somali elders, and neighboring governments and established a level of confidence which was perhaps unique. He was frustrated, however, by inadequate delivery of relief in the face of the deepening famine because of poor donor response and particularly because of UN bureaucratic inflexibility. He increased his credibility with the Somalis by publicly criticizing UN performance -- but at the cost of antagonizing important figures in New York. Unfortunately, when he had painfully negotiated an agreement to admit 500 UN peacekeepers, New York, without coordination with him (or the faction leaders or the chiefs of neighboring states), announced that more than 3,000 troops would be sent to Somalia. This re-ignited the fires of Somali suspicion and destroyed much of the confidence that Sahnoun had built up. He protested in vain, and then, after several other differences, resigned in October. His offer to return in a differently configured capacity

was not accepted.[vi] While the UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) continued, this was considered by many observers to be a major blow to its effectiveness.

US Intervention

Since August 1992 the US had been transporting relief supplies to Somalia under "Operation Provide Relief." In November, in the face of an increasing crisis, media coverage, and further congressional interest, the Bush Administration, having been told by CJCS Powell's representative that "we can do the job," agreed to embark on what became "Operation Restore Hope."[vii] On Dec. 3rd, in response to the US offer to organize and command such an operation, the UNSC voted Resolution 794 authorizing all necessary means to "establish as soon as possible a secure environment for humanitarian relief operations in Somalia." [viii] A United Task Force (UNITAF) of US and other troops under the command of LtGen Robt. Johnston (reporting to CENTCOM) was formed. On Dec. 9th US forces landed in Mogadishu and occupied the port and airfield.

US Civil/Military Coordination

As planning for UNITAF went forward, there was a tendency for the overwhelming military resource base to dwarf the civilian agency effort. There were potentials for disconnects in policy planning and in the field. The key USAID office involved in humanitarian relief was the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, but OFDA noted a tendency to exclude civilian agencies from some of the planning. Further, "OFDA's increasingly marginal role in decision-making circles was related not only to the quite different institutional cultures of OFDA and DOD, but also to the massive disparity in

staff size." It was perceived that "The DOD tended to exclude civilian agencies, including OFDA, from planning." "As one AID staffer noted: 'The DOD is sort of king. Once they go in, forget it.'"[ix] But this relative marginalization was not just the result of an imbalance between the military and civilian sides. There was a conscious effort by some in the Pentagon to ensure that the military dominance was underscored. (Walter Clarke, deputy to Special Envoy Robt. Gosende, was told by one Pentagon contact that "the military would grudgingly accept the Somali mission 'so long as the State Department and the United Nations kept out of the way.'")[x] More damaging, perhaps, was the deliberate decision by CENTCOM to remove civil affairs and the military police training components from the UNITAF package. Since civil affairs officers are especially trained to liaise with foreign communities, this move clearly did not strengthen the capacity of UNITAF to deal with civilian elements -- Somali, third country, or perhaps even U.S.[xi]

These unfortunate proclivities were greatly mitigated in the field by President Bush's decision to establish a political presence to balance the military one. He did so by appointing a special envoy, Amb. Robt. Oakley, with authority to coordinate civilian planning and operations.[2] "No formal guidelines were established for the Johnston-Oakley relationship." [xii] In Mogadishu, they and their senior staffs would meet several times a week, either at Johnston's or at Oakley's office.[xiii] It was the acceptance of this undefined, rather fuzzy coordination system with its inherent flexibility that was perhaps the key element in UNITAF's success, overcoming some of the unavoidable difficulties

[2] Oakley had served as Ambassador to Somalia from 1983 to 1984; he had been expelled after criticizing President Siad's brutality, so his credentials with Aideed and others were in good order.

inherent in the institutional cultures and massive differences in level of resources (civilian vs. military, primarily) of the USG agencies involved.

Operating relationships with elite units sometimes present a special difficulty. One Foreign Service expert in Somalia reported the following privately to me: "I had some very good experiences working directly with military units in the field. During both UNOSOM I and II, I was often loaned to US and other nations' military units to serve as a source of expertise. In virtually every case, my input was welcomed. These commanders made no pretense of experience in dealing with Somalis and welcomed assistance in forming community liaisons, meeting community leaders, and picking their way through the minefields of clan relations. The real problem seemed to be in dealing with headquarters units where there was often a pretense of political expertise and real reluctance to hear outside opinions I suspect some of those came to Somalia believing their own hype, because they refused to hear information from those of us who had been in country (including the military). My impression was that they felt their own organic intel was better than anything anyone else could give them. The result of this was spectacularly embarrassing initial failures." This particularly applied to initial Rangers/Delta raids.

US Forces and Foreign Forces

United Nations forces faced a coordination problem that was to a great degree inevitable in such a situation. The fact of US leadership (more explicit during the UNITAF period (December 1992 - April 1993)) eased some of the coordination questions, but

exacerbated others. The French, whose long experience in Djibouti provided them with forces far more at home in Somalia than Americans could hope to be, picked a rather quiet province and pacified it with a more aggressive effort than was tried (or probably would have been possible, even with many more men on the ground) in Mogadishu. Their distance from headquarters permitted a detached view: "...at the military level, the feeling was that this was an American show and that as long as the French were going to have to watch from the sidelines, they might as well pick safe watching points."[xiv] In the subsequent dispute between the Americans and the Italians (provoked by the softer Italian line towards Aideed -- in turn in part the result of Italian domestic political considerations), the French struck a compromise position, but in fact rather sympathized with the Italians, considering the American effort to capture Aideed "politically inept and militarily unsound."[xv] "France made a declaration to try to bring together the two violently opposed points of view but at the same time to show where its basic sympathies lay: 'France hopes for a friendly solution to the conflict between Italy and the UN. But it shares the Italian concern about better information and a better coordination on the ground.' For 'information' and 'coordination on the ground,' translate in plain English: 'The Americans keep us in the dark, push us around and take for granted that we will go along with whatever they want us to do.'"[xvi]

As both the French and Italian experiences illustrate, the foreign contingents generally claimed for themselves the same rights as did the Americans, i.e., to report formally to their UN superiors, but to reserve the right to check any controversial tasking with their capitals -- or even to implement a somewhat different policy. This situation grew worse

as the more effective C2 relationship of UNITAF gave way to UNISOM II. As the Australian senior officer noted, "The command and control arrangements...of...LTGEN Johnston...and his coordination of politico-military aspects with the US presidential envoy, Mr Robert Oakley, where neither sought to dominate,...was instrumental in the achievement of the mission.... The contrast with subsequent UN and US command and control arrangements during UNISOM II is telling."[xvii] And US coordination with NATO allies was on the whole better than coordination with others. There were important opsec considerations which dictated that the Pakistanis and Malaysians not be informed of the Ranger raid of Oct. 3rd in advance, but the practice of non-coordination was one all too easily adopted -- with damaging results when the Pakistanis and Malaysians were not poised for immediate response.

There is no easy solution to these coordination problems. Joint Doctrine, in principle, acknowledges these difficulties with regard to foreign forces: "When planning for operations involving multinational partners, JFCs should assign missions based on each multinational partner's capabilities. Each nation's political considerations will influence its degree of involvement in a specific MOOTW.... factors create unique interoperability, foreign disclosure and counterintelligence issues...."[xviii] But when the perception that the US treats such efforts as a US show are all too clearly grounded in reality, it is little wonder that other national units are not encouraged to put forth their best effort. Perhaps part of the solution is an ad hoc one -- establishing informal levels of confidence and coordination, depending on the character of the national unit involved. This comes more naturally to diplomats than soldiers, but something like it occurs often

enough between the US and the UK (and Canada, Australia and New Zealand) whose officers are favored with a greater degree of confidence. The major difficulty seems frequently to center on the French, a reciprocal distrust which is all the more unfortunate because often (especially in Africa) the French are more knowledgeable and more experienced than we. France is the member of the European Union with the largest military system and is the state which, second only to the U.S., has the largest global reach; a greater effort to promote combined US-French operations appears to be both useful and prudent.

Humanitarian Relief Organizations

US military relations with the various HROs varied considerably, being generally better in the provinces and more contentious in Mogadishu.[xix] These difficulties were most evident in the issues of security. Most of the HMOs were present before the military arrived and counted on being there when the military left. While they were forced to turn to the military for security, many of the workers had had very little experience with the armed services and "harbored a basic dislike toward the whole concept of military force, particularly in the context of humanitarian assistance."[xx] On the other hand, some of the military viewed the HMOs "with a combination of suspicion and contempt.... (They were) seen as a somewhat undisciplined, disorganized lot whose operations were often counterproductive to achieving the high level of security they demanded that the military establish.... The net effect was an atmosphere characterized by sustained and substantial military support to humanitarian organizations coupled with an often contentious approach that created conflict rather than cooperation."[xxi]

The clearest example of the distrust and misunderstanding was that of the dispute over armed Somali security guards employed by the HMOs. The organizations had no choice if they wanted safety, and many had entered into contracts long before the arrival of UNITAF. However, the latter, with some justification, saw the guards as at best unreliable, at worst part of the Somali problem -- all too likely to turn from guards to thieves in off-hours. The disagreement reached its apex over the efforts to seize weapons of guards accompanying HMO vehicles passing UNITAF checkpoints or coming to the airport. "Even if the weapons were wrongly confiscated, it took four days for the military to return it. The weapons first went from the soldiers to MARFOR (Marine forces) headquarters, where a report was filed. After this, they were taken to the CMOC (Civil-Military Operations Cell). The HROs then had to file for their return, and the CMOC staff had to consider the requests. In the meantime the HRO vehicles sat idle."[xxii] The problem was somewhat alleviated by the adoption of identification cards. This reportedly worked well outside Mogadishu, but poorly in the capital, in part because the military system for issuing the cards was never assigned enough people to meet the issuing demand.[xxiii]

Why were the relations between civilian humanitarian workers and some of the American military worse in Mogadishu than up-country? One reason emerges from the reading: the relative lack of contact between the two groups in the capital. The Command established Humanitarian Operations Centers in Mogadishu and the regions: these were manned by military officers, AID officers and relief workers and offered the prime venue for

interaction between the military and relief staffs. Unfortunately, in Mogadishu, UNITAF officers manned the HOC and the CMOC -- not officers from the Marine force, which was responsible for most security in Mogadishu. The result was a missed opportunity to foster working relations in the context of a common objective. Marines too easily saw the relief workers as creating problems; had they been involved more directly in the resolution of disagreements or coordination of efforts towards the common goal they would have acquired a greater understanding of the problems of the HRO personnel and the interaction would likely have encouraged the development of better solutions earlier.

Conclusion

U.S. operations in Somalia are often deemed a failure. Certainly, the end result -- a country where the southern (formerly Italian) section is still, six years later, without a recognized government and prey to clan violence -- cannot be called a resounding success. There is therefore the temptation to seek an alternative, counter-factual ending, perhaps one that could have emerged from a more determined, focussed and efficient military effort. Such an effort would have treated the problem of security as a military problem, would have provided more of the equipment (e.g., tanks) necessary, and would have insisted on greater responsiveness of various participants (the HRO community in particular). It is my belief that while such an approach properly values a focussed understanding of the essential tasks, it misunderstands the nature of the social, cultural, and political environment in which such operations take place.

I believe that the examples discussed briefly above illustrate the complexity of factors and the variety of participants that must be dealt with if such operations are to be successful (and if they are to enjoy the political support needed to mount and sustain them). One requirement is an appreciation by all concerned of what each participant can contribute. Thus, it would improve matters if the military and civilian agencies of the USG were to work more closely together from the beginning. On the civilian side, the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance might include military officers on secondment. And clearly, when something like UNITAF is in the planning stages, OFDA should be directly involved.

Combined coordination needs to be intensified. In the Somali example, French experience of operating among the Somalis seems not to have been much exploited. More difficult, but important is an awareness of the political context in which countries contribute troops to such a combined effort. Neither UNITAF nor Amb. Oakley seems to have been aware of the factors in Italy that drove the special Italian attitude toward accommodation with Aideed. And combined operations, if it is to draw out the best of the various national units, needs to find ways by which to make such operations at least appear to be less of a US-run show.

Relations with the civilian non-governmental organizations is perhaps most difficult of all. One suggestion (noted above) is to create opportunities for military and civilian joint committees or coordinating groups. Another is to ensure that military elements like civil action are included.

In all of these efforts, part of the key is to cultivate a broad view of the landscape -- to encourage all to understand how the contributions of the various actors fit into the larger picture. Whether an operation is being headed by the military, the Department of State, or perhaps the United Nations, a great degree of flexibility and lateral outreach must accompany the vertical relationships up and down the chain of command.

Despite the failure of our efforts to stabilize and pacify Somalia, much good was accomplished, and thousands who would have died of starvation were fed. Nor do I argue that the problems noted in this paper are not ones of which doctrine is unaware. But application of doctrine, especially when it requires overcoming the weight of standard military practice, is a demanding task. It requires a conscious attempt to approach foreign-located humanitarian relief operations with a deliberately different mind-set. It is that need for a different mental approach and resulting modification of operating style which this paper attempts to underscore.

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[i] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War (Joint Pub 3-07) (Washington, D.C.:June 16, 1995), IV-4.
[ii] Douglas E. Lute, Improving National Capacity to Respond to Complex Emergencies: The U.S. Experience (Washington: Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, 1998), 8.
[iii] Robert Oakley, quoted in Jonathan Stevenson, Losing Mogadishu: Testing U.S. Policy in Somalia (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1995), 26.
[iv] Stevenson, op.cit., p.36
[v] Mahomed Sahnoun, The Missed Opportunities (Washington:United States Institute of Peace Press 1994), 18.

[vi] Ibid., p.39-41.
[vii] John Hirsch and Robert Oakley, Somalia and Operation Restore Hope: Reflections on Peacemaking and Peacekeeping (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 1995), 43.
[viii] Ibid., p.179.
[ix] U.S. Agency for International Development. Humanitarian Aid in Somalia: The Role of the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) 1990-1994. (Washington: Refugee Policy Group,1994) 5&6.
[x] Walter Clarke, "Failed Visions and Uncertain Mandates in Somalia," in Learning from Somalia: The Lessons of Armed Humanitarian Intervention, ed. Walter Clarke and Jeffrey Herbst (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 18.
[xi] Ibid., p.9.
[xii]John Hirsch and Robert Oakley, op. cit., p.50
[xiii] Ibid., p. 72
[xiv] Gerard Prunier, "The Experience of European Armies in Operation Restore Hope," in Learning from Somalia: The Lessons of Armed Humanitarian Intervention , op. cit.,139.
[xv] Ibid., 143.
[xvi] Ibid., 143-44.
[xvii] W.J.A. Mellor, Operation Restore Hope: The Australian Experience (Alexandria, Virginia: Defense Technical Information Center, 1995), 39.
[xviii] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War, op. cit., p.IV-4.
[xix] Kevin M Kennedy, "The Relationship between the Military and Humanitarian Relief Organizations in Operation Restore Hope," in Learning from Somalia: The Lessons of Armed Humanitarian Intervention, op. cit., p.104.
[xx] Ibid., p. 105.
[xxi] Ibid., p.109.
[xxii] Jonathan Dworken, Military Relations With Humanitarian Relief Organizations: Observations from Restore Hope (Alexandria, Virginia: Center for Naval Analysis, distributed by the Defense Technical Information Center, 1993), 31.
[xxiii] Kevin M Kennedy, op.cit., p. 111-113.

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